MEN’S VIOLENCE TO WOMEN
– A Swedish perspective
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Introduction

Men’s violence against women within close relationships is a serious social problem and represents a major threat to women’s and children’s health, welfare and lives. One of the most important measures that can be taken to prevent this crime is to disseminate information. This information must include all facets of this complex issue – the extent of the violence and its forms, society’s responsibility plus an understanding of the connection between men’s dominance and violence and a social pattern in which men are superior and women subordinate. Change is made possible through making the causes of the violence, and their possible solutions, visible.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) intends to work for the development of successful models aimed at the prevention of threats and violence to women and children. The association also wishes to promote collaboration in order to identify good solutions for vulnerable women and to transfer and make accessible knowledge concerning men’s violence to women within close relationships.

This booklet presents a brief overview of the problem. The various forms of violence are discussed, as are explanations as to how violence is able to occur to the extent it does. Good examples of working with women subjected to violence and their children are described, as well as indications of how to work in a preventative manner.

With this booklet, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) wishes to stimulate and reinforce gender violence prevention activities at local, regional and national levels.

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About SALAR

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) represents the governmental, professional and employer related interests of Sweden’s 290 local municipalities, 18 county councils and two regions. SALAR strives to promote and strengthen local government and to create the best possible conditions for the work of its members. One aim is to combat and prevent violence to women, including domestic violence.
Men’s violence to women – a major social problem

Men’s violence to women is a crime against human rights. It is an immense global social problem and the most extreme example of the prevailing imbalance of power in the relationship between women and men.
Men’s violence to women occurs in all social classes, in all professional groups, in all housing areas. It is a public health problem that brings with it serious, costly consequences for both the individual and society.

What is the problem called?

The name of a phenomenon often influences how it is interpreted and understood as it is possible to use a name to mask or diminish a problem. It is very common for violent men to redefine their violence. A violent event after which the woman perhaps needed medical treatment for her injuries could be termed an argument by him. An argument implies something mutual and routine and, primarily, it means something that is not very serious.

Domestic violence is often used as a synonym for a man’s violence against his female partner or ex-partner in the home. This term can also mean violence against other family members such as children, elderly people or pets. This expression is problematic as it hides both who is the perpetrator and who is the victim. Neither does it say anything about their relationship to/with each other.

It is important to recognise the link between men’s use of violence and a social pattern in which men are superior and women subordinate. The power imbalance between the genders is one of the primary causes of men’s violence to women. Violence always has a gender aspect that should never be forgotten.

Within SALAR the problem has been given the title men’s violence against women or gender violence, with the aim of describing exactly what is their main concern. It is considered vital to show that this includes physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as other actions that undermine a woman’s integrity, in the vast majority of cases exercised by a man against a woman close to him. This violence is regarded as a part of the discrimination of women in society and is an expression of the unequal power relationship between women and men.

THE UN DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE TO WOMEN

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

According to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

EU activities

Men’s violence to women occurs at all ages and in all social classes. A study of 15 European countries carried out by the Council of Europe shows that 45 per cent of all women have experienced some form of violence - physiological, physical or sexual. Approximately 25 per cent of the women in the study had been subjected to physical violence and 10 per cent to sexual violence.¹ Violence to women has been discussed within the various EU agencies; however each member country designs its own legislation. In February 2006 the European Parliament adopted an own-initiative report on how violence to women should be combated. Here, member countries were encouraged to classify sexual violence within marriage as a crime. The European Parliament also maintained that member countries should regard violence to women as a violation of human rights.

The consequences of violence

Men’s violence to women causes considerable personal suffering to women in addition to physical and physiological ill health and often also financial difficulties. One
aspect of this that was previously often forgotten is the financial cost both to society and to the individual. Not least the health problems experienced by women as a direct result of men’s violence generate direct financial costs in addition to personal suffering.

Physical injuries

Women applying for medical care for injuries resulting from an assault do not always say exactly how they received their injuries. However to the trained eye, this type of injury can be recognised as distinct from other types of injuries – for example they are often distributed all over the body. Falling down stairs or tripping and knocking into furniture or doors, which the men and sometimes even the women say was the cause, give totally different injuries. The women also often show defensive bruising on the back of their forearms received when the woman attempts to protect herself. The most obvious injuries as a result of assault include contusions, swelling, bruising, tufts of hair pulled out and fractures. Often the women also suffer split ear drums, broken noses and fractures of the jaw.

Consequences for women’s psychological health

Many women who are subjected to violence state that the psychological violence and the threats have a more prolonged effect than the physical violence. Scars on the body heal more easily while “scars on the soul” take much longer to fade and, in the best case scenario, totally disappear. Consequently a woman may apply for medical care quite a long time after the violence has ended without realising the connection between her experience of violence and her health problems.

The acute psychological effects may include shock, confusion, extreme fear and incoherent speech. Depression, sexual problems, easily-triggered anxiety, a
negative self-image and low self confidence are other consequences which may appear after a certain period has elapsed.³

Other effects of violence and abuse may include women consuming more prescription drugs, especially tranquillizers and anti-depressives. This is especially common if they have been subjected to threats.⁴ Suicide attempts are also common. Of Swedish women subjected to violence, as many as 64 per cent have considered suicide as a method of escape at some point.⁵

Researchers Heimer and Posse⁶ state that women who are subjected to violence experience multi-trauma. They often apply for medical care based on symptoms such as pain, sleeping problems, anxiety and depression. Their belief in other people is often severely damaged which may contribute to them refusing to disclose important information. Heimer and Posse state that health professionals often show lack of insight into the problem. This may be due to lack of time, lack of routines and expert staff, fear of insulting the woman and of falsely accusing the man or powerlessness in the situation, to name some possibilities.

**Men’s violence is costing society**

It was not until this century that socioeconomic impact was included in the discussion on men’s violence to women. In several countries attempts have been made to quantify costs; however there are many uncertain factors which make calculations difficult. One aspect that is especially difficult to assess is the drain on public resources caused by this type of violence. If society did not need fund measures aimed at dealing with the consequences of men’s violence to women, these resources could be allocated to other urgent social needs.

The World Bank, which maps constraints on economic development in various countries, has found that violence and sexual assault shortens the life expectancy of the women of the world at least to the same extent as all forms of cancer do.⁷ In 1999 the Chief Economist of the World Bank estimated that the cost of men’s violence to women in USA was the equivalent of approximately 3 per cent of that country’s GNP.⁸

Even if it is not possible to identify and weight all relevant factors for a cost estimate, it is important to get an image of the cost of this violence. Not least this may be a way of grabbing the attention of those who otherwise show no interest in men’s violence to women.

The economist Stefan de Vylder⁹ speaks of direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include the value of material objects such as furniture, household articles, clothes and other belongings and all the help that the care of victims of violence includes, legal processes and punishment for the perpetrators plus actions of prevention. Generally speaking all these costs fall to society. The value of voluntary inputs should also be estimated in financial terms in order to provide a complete picture.

Indirect costs include loss of income, decreased ability to work, medical care costs and increased costs as a result of psychological suffering such as excessive use of psycho-pharmaceuticals, depression, anxiety and suicide. Some of these costs are more difficult to calculate than others, for example decreased ability to work productively.

**A Swedish example**

In a new study from the University of Umeå in Sweden, costs for one individual case were calculated. In this case a man physically abused his female partner over a period of 20 years. Costs were summarised at SEK 2.5 million of which the Swedish state financed the major part – approximately 85 per cent. Costs primarily consisted of payments from unemployment and health insurance systems. The abuse cost the health and medical care systems SEK 115 000, of which more than half consisted of treatment by the child and youth mental care system. The municipality’s costs amounted to around SEK 50 000 primarily for social services.¹⁰
Expressions of violence

For many women, home is a very dangerous place. The most common forms of violence to women and girls occur within the family and in the home. The man’s violence against the woman gradually develops until it becomes a part of everyday routines. Violence is expressed in many ways and in large measure consists of psychological control and exercise of power.
Different forms of violence

The very foundation of a concept is its definition. When defining violence against a partner it is vital to include all the different aspects of this violence. Physical violence such as blows, kicks, strangleholds can be identified as violence by most people while other assaults often fall outside the framework of what is perceived as such. It is important to be aware that power instruments other than physical violence and dominance methods also constitute violence, and often form a precondition for the actual physical violence. Where there are blows and kicks there is also ridicule, insults and control.

Psychological violence takes many different forms. These include verbal insults, attempts to isolate the woman from her surroundings, making sure she is financially dependent, destroying belongings that are dear to her, threats and instilling fear, emotional blackmail, shaming her and utilising children to gain control over the woman.\textsuperscript{11}

A great deal of the control and violence to women is of a psychological nature. Unpredictability is a well-known method for gaining power - one moment calm, helpful and loving the next irritable, threatening and violent. This is a common pattern of behaviour in violent men and it makes women uncertain about what is going on, more passive and anxious to please.\textsuperscript{12} Many women subjected to violence feel ashamed of being abused. That they have let themselves down and not protected their own human integrity is often regarded as the worst aspect of the abuse.

Holmberg & Enander\textsuperscript{13} describe how emotional ties of love, fear, hate, sympathy, guilt and hope often bind the woman to the man and make it easier for him to control her. These ties are also discussed by Dutton & Painter\textsuperscript{14}, who maintain that they prevent disclosure of the problem to outsiders and maintain the destructive relationship.

Gradual development towards physical violence

Physical violence does not just suddenly explode one day. Violence develops gradually in a process. It often begins with the man criticising the woman, taunting her and preventing her from socialising with friends, acquaintances and family. Gradually the woman is isolated and the man increases his control over her. Bit by bit the man begins to use threats of various kinds and the woman is driven to adapt to the man’s will in order to avoid further violence. It is common for the man to threaten to kill her or take their children from her if she tries to leave him.

As this process develops gradually it is difficult for the woman to understand these small power shifts and often she does not react until serious physical violence occurs. Then she often believes that the man has gone crazy and regards it as just a sudden, irrational explosion.

Control and isolation

One common observation by women subjected to violence is what separates taking care of someone and taking control of them is a very fine line and can be identified only with hindsight. Initially some of the man’s demands may be based on consideration and care when, for example, he wishes to know where she spends her time and with whom. However with time he wants a detailed report and clearly shows his disapproval of certain contacts with friends, colleagues and relatives – especially if they are men. The man often implies that the woman is using every opportunity to cheat on him with other men. Gradually the woman decreases her contacts with friends, relatives and acquaintances and perhaps cuts them out all together.
Escalating psychological violence

Then a phase of systematic denigration of the woman begins: continuously repeated verbal criticisms at times disguised as jokes with an uncomfortable undertone on the faults he considers her to have and observations on how stupid she is. In the next phase, psychological violence is escalated. Insulting comments continue and are linked to threats, moodiness and unpredictable behaviour by the man. He may threaten suicide if the woman does not agree to all his demands; he may threaten children or pets. At this point physical violence against the woman has yet to occur, however he may throw furniture around or aim blows at the woman. However, instead of hitting the woman he punches the wall just next to her.

Threats have an extremely strong impact as the victim does not actually know what may happen, a situation that, in many cases, causes more anxiety than open violence. The aim of this tactic is to limit the woman’s space for action.

Physical violence is a surprise

The final phase is when he uses physical violence in combination with psychological violence. This physical violence can take many different forms and also is often introduced in combination with sexual assault.15

Women often say they were totally surprised and shocked by blows, kicks, strangleholds and the vicious insults they are subjected to. “Like a bolt out of the blue” is a common description. When the first shock has subsided a little it is very common that the couple decide to try to forget what has happened.

Changeability, calm periods

An outbreak of violence may be followed by a period of calm when the man can be both apologetic and make special efforts to care for the woman. However, gradually this period changes into a phase of increased tension which then accelerates into physical violence. During these periods of calm the man can behave like the person the woman once fell in love with and her hopes that he will continue in this manner increases. Against the background of the violent episodes, the contrast makes these calm periods appear exaggeratedly light and hopeful.16

FACT BOX 2
CONTROL AND DOMINANCE METHODS USED BY VIOLENT MEN

1. Isolation. The woman is prevented from meeting relatives, friends, colleagues and others who might act as a counterweight to the man’s assessment of her and his interpretation of different events.

2. Fear. Brutal behaviour, threatening gestures, looks and tone of voice. Behaving unpredictably and blaming her when she does not understand what he means. Forcing her to do things she is afraid of.

3. Force and threats. Threat of punishment, threats against children, pets, close friends etc. in order to force the woman to agree against her will.

4. Financial control. The man controls the family finances, the woman becomes financially dependent on him. He can stop her from working outside the home or force her to take a loan.

5. Blackmail via the children. The father sends messages including (hidden) threats, insults etc. via the children. He encourages the children to ridicule her, call her nasty names etc. and threatens to take them away from the woman.
When the woman leaves

It is not unusual that a woman leaves a violent man only when she starts to fear for her own life and/or that of her children. Often the first step on the road to leaving is that she overcomes her fear of expected reprisals if he were to suspect that she was trying to leave. Then she may try to talk to someone close she feels she can trust; family members or friends. Their first reaction is, unfortunately, usually scepticism to what the woman is telling them, which may have the effect of stopping her efforts to go farther in her search for help.17

Others who have some idea of what is happening may be afraid of getting involved but sometimes someone may take an initiative and ask the woman about her situation. This question, and the woman’s answer, is then often followed by suggestions about trying to find help from authorities or a women’s shelter. With their help it is possible for the woman to receive support and help to begin planning. The best way to find out if physical, psychological or sexual violence is occurring is to put a direct question. A direct question is: has your partner ever hit you or threatened you? According to a study of approximately 6 000 women from 50 women’s shelters in USA, on average women had looked for help six times from their family, friends and social institutions before they finally left the relationship.18

When violence occurs in connection with separations, both its intensity and content can change over time. During the period directly after the actual decision to separate the violence – physical, sexual, psychological – is the most serious. The physical violence appears to decrease with time while the psychological violence, including threats/warnings appears to be more difficult to extinguish.19

In Sweden, approximately 40 per cent of the known, i.e. reported to police, violence occurs after the woman has broken up from a relationship.20 The man may continue to harass, watch and threaten her. This is also called stalking,21 which in its most common form means that a man follow and threatens his ex-partner.22 This means that it is difficult for the woman to concentrate on her own life as she is in constant fear of what he might do. Consequently the man has achieved a part of his aim which is to continue to control the woman.

More vulnerable groups of women

Men’s violence to women occurs in all social classes and in all age groups. Certain groups of women subjected to violence may experience special problems and needs due to language difficulties, social isolation, ignorance of the legal system and on of available help available from society. Below is a list of some of these groups.

Violence during pregnancy

Physical violence often begins during a woman’s first pregnancy. If violence has already begun it may accelerate during the pregnancy.21 The man does not hesitate to aim blows and kicks at the woman’s belly area.24 He may also make up accusations that he is not the father of the child and so is “entitled” to abuse his partner. It is not unusual that abused women report miscarriages or premature births that they feel are a direct result of this violence.25

Honour-related violence

Violence that is carried out in the name of family or clan honour is called honour-related violence. The definition of honour is here explicitly based on the norm of men’s superiority to women. This is a strong patriarchal order where norms for manliness are, to a considerable degree, designed with respect to men’s control and power over the family’s women and especially of their chastity.

Honour-related violence differs from other forms of men’s violence to women primarily by providing a
clear tradition as a norm guide and in emphasising the collective – the family and the clan – rather than the individual. The woman who is affected by it may also be more vulnerable as the threat of total social isolation from family and relatives may make breaking away an enormously difficult step to take.

Here it is vital to understand the background and make an attempt to open up a dialogue with the family at an early stage before the problem comes to the fore. Those who come into contact with these families and their girls must learn to recognise the warning signs.26

Women who are substance abusers

While substance abuse problems and women abuse may occur in all social environments, women without resources face a much more difficult situation. They are physically abused and violated in many different ways and at the same time have fewer opportunities to get help. Sometimes they stay with a violent man because he provides them with drugs. Sometimes they sell sex to finance their own and their partner’s addictions.27

Women with disabilities

Women with disabilities are a forgotten group as concerns violence in relationships. Researchers Björck & Heimer28 state that the key concept in this context is dependency - the greater the degree of disability the greater the degree of dependence and of vulnerability. The Swedish Association for Social and Mental Health has estimated that around 70 per cent of women with psychological disabilities have been victims of various types of assault.

Women’s violence against men

Men are victims of violence more often than women are, however for both groups the perpetrators are men. A clear pattern of violent events shows that men primarily are subjected to violence by unknown men outdoors. However the most common form of violence to women and girls occurs inside the home, within the family.29

It is unusual that women physically abuse their male partners. This area has been studied very little but it appears that a small group of women, probably 3–5 per cent of all known cases of partner violence, may be considered to be abusers.30 Women’s violence against a male partner is generally part of a situation in which the man is already violent and threatening.31

All existing research is unanimous in its findings that women are not as aggressive as men, and that their violence is nowhere close to being as serious and damaging as men’s.32 Neither do women stalk and harass their ex partners to the same extent as men do. In addition there is no evidence that women attempt to compensate for their, on average, weaker physical strength by the use of blunt instruments or weapons.33

Violence in homosexual relationships

Violence also occurs in homosexual relationships. As in heterosexual relationships, violence occurs in different forms: physical, sexual and psychological.34 Often dependency on a partner is great when both belong to a minority.35 When violence in a homosexual relationship occurs it becomes clear that there is a lack of knowledge about this problem and a lack of access to proper support.36 Prejudice against lesbians may mean that they cannot gain access to the same resources as heterosexual women in the same situation. Many people appear to need reminding that a woman subjected to violence by another woman is in need of the same sort of support and assistance as the woman who has been assaulted by a man.
Homosexual women and men also run a greater risk than heterosexuals of being subjected to violence just because they are homosexual.
3 How to explain men’s violence to women?

Men’s violence to women was long considered a private matter and both its frequency and its seriousness were underestimated. The interplay of violence with norms, values and attitudes in the surrounding society was also excluded.
Explanations of men’s violence to women, and the relationship between gender and violence, can be found in various theoretical schools of thought. However, in order to understand men’s violence to women there are no theories that have been as fruitful as those with gender perspectives, in which the roots of the problem are located in inequality between women and men in a society.

Who is affected?

There is nothing to indicate that women who are subjected to violence and violations have any special characteristic in common. Previously some experts felt that submissive women with poor self-confidence were subjected to violence more often than other women. Or, the opposite, that women were physically abused when they showed themselves to be strong and wanted to leave. Both interpretations indirectly place the responsibility on the woman and feed the prejudicial position where men’s behaviour is excuses and their actual responsibility is neglected. In addition both interpretations mean that violent men receive support for their own excuses for abusing their partners.

Gender power complex

WHO states in a report that men’s violence to women is particularly frequent in societies with a high level of inequality between women and men, where gender roles are rigid, where cultural norms support a man’s right to use violence, and where sanctions against this type of violence are weak. The culture and the society we live in contribute to, and influence, men’s violence to women and consequently must be examined in order to understand the entire problem. If violence were carried out only by cer-

FACT BOX 3
ANALYSIS LEVELS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER AND VIOLENCE

Individual level. The explanation at this level is based on the fact that men possessing certain characteristics and experiencing certain problems are violent. For example men with alcohol and drug problems, criminal men, mentally ill men, psychopaths and men who have been subjected to violence themselves during their childhood. However, emphasising personal characteristics only may mean that the problem is down-sized and it may be difficult to identify preventative measures. It is the individual who chooses to carry out these actions, but factors in his surroundings facilitate, explain and even perhaps excuse the violence he perpetrates against his partner.

Structural level. Examples of important structures in society include the family and working life. Here there are different (often unspoken) norms for women and men, for example the level of freedom to be enjoyed by teenage sons or daughters, or the opportunities to use time for professional work enjoyed by mothers and fathers. These structures are supported by legislation and/or traditions, for example family law or labour market legislation. Examples of structural violence include prostitution, trafficking, genital mutilation, forced marriage and sexual harassment. Explanations at this level regard men’s violence as a problem connected to societal organisation that directly or indirectly encourages and facilitates for individual men to dominate, control and even use violence against women.

Cultural level. Explanations at the cultural level concern frames of perception, norms and values that may serve as an excuse for violence. Cultural control and influence on men and women, norms determining what is good male and good female behaviour, different levels of acceptance of actions and behaviour by gender, can be found everywhere. Unspoken norms are internalised, and values that denigrate women may be considered as normal by both men and women.

Understanding the forms, scope, facilitating factors of violence and of how individuals manage violence must include all three levels. Combating injustice and inequitable structures can be achieved through the adoption of new legislation and its strict application, which in the long term is expected to affect both actions and values. However norms change much more slowly than legislation does.
taine deviating individuals, explanations like psychological abnormalities, drug problems and/or criminality in violent men would be sufficient. However these men are not alone in using violence against their female partners. It is widely known that men who appear well-adapted in the outside world can be violent to women close to them.

This complex includes three levels that partially explain the various elements and that form a framework for our understanding of, and reaction to, violence. The levels are: individual differences and variations, structural factors and cultural norms and values. (Please refer to Fact Box 3, page 15). Together these form what is generally referred to as the gender power complex. The concept “complex” refers to the situation where men are superior and women subordinated.

Who are the violent men?

In official statistics on men who physically abuse their partners, some groups are over represented i.e. groups such as substance abusers, criminals and men with low social status. The problem with this picture is that a considerable amount of violence to women is hidden; many abusive men are never reported to the police and are consequently not included in the statistics.

Most men are not violent and there is no clear answer to the question of why certain men abuse women. Men who physically abuse their partners come from all social classes. Men who use violence against one partner tend to repeat this pattern in new relationships. Violent men often feel that they are “entitled” to dominate women.

Researchers have made many attempts to identify common personality traits among violent men, with varying results. In studies of proven violent men there has been no personal characteristic separating them from non-violent men who live in problematic and conflict-ridden relationships. Women often describe violent men as insecure – which initially means that women perceive them as unthreatening or “kind” – and given to jealousy. One common behaviour pattern is that these men are anxious to rapidly establish a permanent relationship that signals to the world that the two of them are a couple. It has been proposed that men who abuse their partners experience special difficulties with managing loss of control in provocative situations. However this argument is counteracted by the fact that they can manage other difficult situations without resorting to violence. Abusive men carefully select who they are going to subject to violence, as well as when and where it is to occur.

Researchers Dobash & Dobash summarise the characteristics of violent men in four points:

a. Jealous with a feeling of ownership of the woman.

b. Expectations concerning women’s work in the home and men’s right to demand such services.

c. A feeling of being entitled to judge and punish women.

d. The aim is to maintain his authority in the home.

The abusive man will often excuse his violence by saying that he was drunk or frustrated. Society needs explanations for male violence and inebriation is acceptable. British researcher Jeff Hearn explains how male groupings tend to protect violent men by separating private and public life. A good friend or an admired colleague will not be questioned if his violence to his wife and children is discovered; this is considered to belong to the private sphere.

Society’s view on what constitutes normal masculinity may include occasional use of violence when other forms of dominance are not sufficient. For example, little boys who fight do not receive the same reprimands as little girls who do the same, and physical fights bet-
ween young men are not considered as shocking as fights between young women.

**Is there a link between use of alcohol and men’s violence?**

There is a direct relation between increased sales of alcohol and reported violence to women. However men with alcohol problems do not all behave in the same manner when they are under the influence. One group of men always become abusive when drunk, others are always sober when they use violence. A third group can abuse drunk or sober.

In many contexts it is legitimate to blame intoxication in order to excuse otherwise unacceptable behaviour such as fighting or sexual advances or even assaults. The man may say “I was so drunk I didn’t know what I was doing.” Even if this is not accepted in court it is often an explanation and an excuse understood by those around him.

**Social legacy**

Social legacy i.e. that a certain behaviour pattern repeats itself generation after generation and follows the same gender pattern appears to play a certain role in this phenomenon. A man who grew up with a violent father may imitate him and abuse his own wife. However the social legacy does not appear to apply to women who grow up in families where the mother is a victim of violence. They do not learn to accept violence and do not choose a violent man to a greater degree than other women.  

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4 Children who have experienced violence

Violence against the mother is also indirect violence against the children. Children, irrespective of age, know what is going on even if the parents are convinced that the children are asleep or do not understand these events. Mothers try in all possible ways to protect their children by, for example, not screaming in pain or crying out loud. However, the children understand anyway.
Children are also victims of this crime

The most common witnesses to violence against a woman are her children. Swedish Save the Children estimates that as many as ten per cent of children have experienced violence in their homes at some point. Children who experience violence are subjected to extremely frightening, often traumatising, events and children who are present when a physical attack takes place are victims of a crime. According to the amendment to Swedish legislation in effect since 15th November 2006, it is clearly stated that children who witness violence or other assaults to adults close to them are victims of crimes and may be in need of help and support.

Children who experience violence against their mothers also run the risk of becoming the targets of violence themselves. According to a major survey 21 per cent of women who had been subjected to violence stated that their children had been victims of violence in previous relationships and five per cent of this group said that the children were subjected to violence from the man in their current relationship. In addition, two per cent of these women stated that their children had been the victims of sexual assault.

A violent father may utilise children as messengers, bringing threatening messages to their mother. He may convince the children it is the mother’s fault that the situation is as it is and that she is to blame for provoking him to hit her. He may lie and tell the children that their mother has done things that are not right and blame her and the children for it. This may continue even after separation when bringing or fetching children may offer the man opportunities for new attacks and/or forced sexual contacts. Often the women do not protest in order to avoid upsetting the children or because they do not wish to give them a negative picture of their father.

Children’s reactions

Children’s reactions depend on their age, gender and maturity and are similar to other, well-known signals that a child is not doing well. Very young children are often generally uneasy, whiney and scared of being separated from their parents, for example during a visit to a child health clinic. Children who can speak and have a better understanding of their surroundings may show sympathy for their mother and attempt to protect her.

Children who witness violence against their mothers may become traumatised. They experience extreme fear and helplessness, recurring nightmares and other terror-filled memories. Pre-school age children may at times also imitate the violence shown by their fathers and become aggressive against, for example, their friends. This is more common among boys than girls.

School-age children may understand that their family is different to their friends’ families. On one hand they do not always realise the full impact of the abuse as they have grown up with it but at the same time they do feel anxiety, worry and guilt. Younger school-age children usually react according to gender; boys act out and come into conflict with friends and teachers, girls become quiet and withdrawn.

Teenagers are aware that their family is abnormal and are often reluctant to bring their friends home. They often blame the problem on their mothers and teenage boys may become violent with her themselves and also with their girlfriends. At the same time they are worried about it and feel bad. The opposite reaction can also be observed where some boys, when they are old enough, attack their fathers or dream of being able to do so.
Help for children who have experienced violence

Children’s reactions are linked to the support they are able to obtain from their surroundings; whether they have a safe adult they can turn to. Sometimes older relatives can help to provide stability in a chaotic situation. One precondition is that the adult speaks the truth and does not deny the violence, without taking the side of either of the adults. Parents and others believe that they are protecting the children by avoiding a straight discussion of the situation. However, the effect may be the opposite as children actually tend to become more anxious and insecure when information is withheld. It is easy for children then to experience powerlessness and they often blame themselves.

Physical safety is decisive for the provision of help to mothers and children subjected to violence if the desired effect is to be achieved. They have to move to a safe, violence-free situation and need someone who allows them to describe their experiences, thoughts and anxiety; this is someone who believes them and can give them help and support to process their experiences.55

Teenagers may need special inputs. Young people who have lived with violence for many years may have integrated it into their picture of normal life and regard it as unavoidable. They must gain another view of life. Teenagers may also need to vent their disappointment in their parents and how they have had to take a back seat to the adults’ conflict-filled lives.56

FACT BOX 4

TALKING TO CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE

- It is not the children’s responsibility to begin talking. Be very clear and ask them concrete questions.
- Make sure that the children will not be subjected to more violence if they begin to tell someone outside their families.
- When children are in a safe, secure environment they need to talk about their experiences. They may also need therapy if they have seen abuse or themselves been victimized.
- Confirm to the children that you know that violence has occurred and listen to them. Tell them that it is possible to have different feelings as concerns violence, feelings belonging to those who use violence and those who are its victims. State clearly that it is perfectly OK to have these feelings. Tell them that violence is the responsibility of adults.
- Use clear, simple language. Give violence its correct name.
- Do not use occasions when children are upset to obtain more information. Children are loyal to their parents.

5 The situation in Sweden

In Sweden, municipalities are responsible for providing support and for helping women subjected to violence. County councils also bear responsibility for discovering and identifying this group and providing proper medical and psychosocial care.

Men’s violence to women in close relationships is a complex problem that concerns several actors such as the legal system and its authorities, health and medical care and social services. Cooperation between authorities and organisations is considered to be essential for dealing with this problem efficiently.
Swedish legislation concerning gross violation of a woman’s integrity

At the end of the 1970s the first women’s help lines/shelters were started up in Sweden. In addition to providing help for women subjected to violence, they also ran information and lobbying activities and became leading voices, in many ways, in the debate on how men’s violence to women was to be managed.57 This popular movement came to play a decisive role in changing attitudes and in drafting new legislation.

In 1982 physical abuse of women became a crime for public prosecution. In spite of this it remained, and still is, difficult to obtain sufficient evidence to convict the man in court without the participation of the woman involved.

New legislation came in 1998 concerning men’s violence to women. This was based on a report entitled Women’s Freedom from Molestation58 which used an analysis of the violence that affects women, the experience of victims and current research as its basis. Here it is underscored that the previous approach of primarily looking at the physical violence was too limited and the importance of including sexual and psychological violence in the definition of violence was emphasised. The report on gross violation of a woman’s integrity led to an Action Programme that was given the overall name of Freedom from gross violation of women’s integrity and that included tougher legislation (Please refer to Fact Box 5).

Prostitution presupposes an unequal relationship between the two parties and the new Act on Sexual Crimes from 1999, which prohibited the purchase of sexual services, also belongs to the Swedish legislation concerning gross violation of a woman’s integrity. This law criminalises the buying but not the selling of sex in an attempt to eliminate the market that forms the most important foundation of prostitution. It was a significant step to include this form of structural violence to women by attempting to shift the stigma from the woman to the customer, the man.

FACT BOX 5

THE SWEDISH REFORM CONCERNING GROSS VIOLATION OF A WOMAN’S INTEGRITY

In 1993 the Swedish government appointed a commission to make a review of issues concerning violence to women based on a women’s perspective. The commission’s final report contained a number of proposals to counteract men’s violence to women.

This report formed the basis of a Government Bill that was passed by the Riksdag (Parliament) in 1998. The result was a collection of measures – The Swedish reform concerning gross violation of a woman’s integrity – that included tighter legislation, preventative measures and improved demeanour for meeting women subjected to violence.

Exceptionally gross violation of a woman’s integrity

Swedish legislation concerning gross violation of a woman’s integrity introduced a new crime onto the books – exceptionally gross violation of a woman’s integrity – which (briefly) covers the following:

If a man commits a criminal act against a woman (e.g. assault, threatening behaviour, illegal sexual assault, sexual exploitation) who he is, or has been married to or who he is, or has been cohabiting with, he is to be convicted of exceptionally gross violation of a woman’s integrity. One precondition is that the act formed one element of repeated violations of the woman’s integrity and has had the expressed aim of seriously damaging her self-esteem. Punishment is prison for a period of six months to six years. When determining length of sentence, special consideration must be given to the repetition or systematic abuse pattern of the man’s behaviour.
Men’s violence in Sweden

Sweden has about 9 million inhabitants. The number of reported physical abuse cases against women, irrespective of location (indoors or outdoors) and independent of relationship to the perpetrator (known or unknown) in 2005 amounted to a little over 24,000. Of these, in 75% of the cases the perpetrator was known to the victim, that is 18,000 cases (The term “case” may mean that the same person was registered more than once, each incident will become a new case). On average there were 49 cases a day reported in which a woman was physically assaulted by a man she knew. In addition, in 2005 more than 2,000 cases of exceptionally gross violation of a woman’s integrity were reported to the police as well as 11,000 sexual crimes. The majority of the individuals suspected of sexual crimes are men.

In Sweden approximately 16 women a year die as a result of men’s violence in close relationships.

The proportion of these crimes reported to the police is, in fact, a very small part of the actual numbers. The number of unreported incidents is huge. The real figure is closer to four times the reported figure in accordance with a general rule used in international research concerning violence against individuals.

Society’s actors

It is essential that society reacts strongly when men use violence against women, both to enforce punishment for the crime that has been committed and as a deterrent, but also to send a signal that violence against a partner is unacceptable behaviour.

Municipalities

In Sweden municipalities bear responsibility for the provision of support and help to women who have been subjected to violence. However a study from 2004 discovered that in many places social services transfer this responsibility to women’s shelters. At the same time there is no guarantee that the women’s shelters receive the necessary funding to carry out the work they are expected to do and also the work they would like to do.

For a considerable period of time municipal action plans have been emphasised as efficient instruments for municipal operations to aid and support abused women, however the establishment of these plans is not obligatory.

FACT BOX 6

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SWEDEN

Sweden has a long tradition of local self-government. The municipalities and the county councils/regions are responsible for providing the major part of all public services. They have a considerable degree of autonomy as well as independent powers of taxation. Local self-government and the right to levy taxes are stipulated in the Instrument of Government, one of the four pillars of the Swedish Constitution.

Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities, 18 counties and two regions (the regions are Västra Götaland and Skåne). Municipalities are responsible for matters relating to the inhabitants of the municipality. The main task of the county councils and regions is healthcare. The supreme political decision-making body is the national parliament, the Riksdag.

Sweden’s municipalities and county councils/regions have a great deal of freedom to organize their activities as they see fit. Their responsibilities are regulated partly in the Local Government Act and partly in laws and statutes covering specific areas, for example the Social Services Act, the Education Act and the Health and Medical Services Act. The scope for local and regional self-government is also affected by decisions taken in the EU.
In a report from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare\textsuperscript{64} four separate types of action plans are described according to their emphases:

- Routines/guidelines for employees who meet women who have been subjected to violence and their children.
- Plans for operational development, often including clearly stated goals for operations and the measures necessary to fulfil these goals.
- Information on the resources available at the municipality, relevant authorities and NGOs.
- Goals and overall policy for the entire municipality, however, without stating how these are to be achieved or the resources available.

Educational inputs concerning men’s violence to women are often offered at Sweden’s universities in an extremely sporadic fashion and usually consist of elective sub-courses or depend on the commitment of individuals. Many municipalities operate their own staff training for various categories of employees such as social workers, teachers, police officers, health and medical care staff and others who, in the course of their professional lives, must be able to manage issues concerning men’s violence to women properly.

**County councils**

/health and medical care systems

The health and medical care services are often the first official contact for women victims of violence. Women and men who have been subjected to violence or threats of violence experience considerably poorer health and consume larger amounts of care and pharmaceuticals than women and men who have not experienced violence.\textsuperscript{65} In Sweden, legislation places a clear responsibility on health and medical care providers to identify victims of violence and to offer proper medical psychosocial care for them. However these systems are still too passive and do not function to the proper extent. Medical care personnel’s knowledge and awareness of their own attitudes is vital in order to provide a good first contact with women who have been subjected to violence.\textsuperscript{66}

**The legal system**

The task of the police is to combat crime and protect its victims. As men’s violence to women falls under public prosecution, the police do not have to wait for the woman to report the crime, however they need her cooperation.

Sometimes divorce, a prison sentence or other types of consequences is not enough to force a violent man to let a woman leave him and to live in peace. Society can offer various types of protection which can be adapted to the type of threat, from a civil protection order to obtain a protected address and identity. Protection needs are generally managed by the police. Many police districts in Sweden have established routines for the improved organisations of their work of combating violence. A good number have developed checklists that each officer carries with them stating the questions to ask and the observations to make. The first measure taken by the police may be a security interview with the woman concerned in order to gain a picture of the threats to her and make an assessment of her security, including that of her home. She may also be offered a police contact person. The aims of these measures are to prevent crime and to create security.\textsuperscript{67}

The number of cases that are not prosecuted in this area is extremely large. It is partly due to the fact that these are difficult cases to prove. At the same time there is a lack of knowledge of what violence to women within close relationships really includes, such as the fact that the woman may fear for her life if she testifies.
against the man. Many actors within the legal system seem to find it difficult to understand that violence is not private business to be settled between two, equal adults. More, improved training of the legal profession in all stations is essential.⁶⁸

**Women’s shelters**

There are approximately 160 women’s and girls’ shelters in Sweden. Each shelter is autonomous and works according to local conditions and interests at municipal level and, in most cases, with municipal grants. A great deal of their operations rests on the voluntary, unpaid work of individual members. One, extremely important service offered by many women’s shelters is safe living accommodations for women and their children. Other support includes hotline assistance, counselling and going with the woman for appearances in court, visits to social services etc. The work of these organisations also includes helping the woman organize her social and financial situation, often within the framework of individual support programmes or group activities.

Many municipalities use the women’s shelters as instruments to provide the support and help that the municipality itself is legally obliged to give.⁶⁹
A society free from violence?

The fact that men’s violence to women is regarded as a social problem means that society’s representatives and authorities are required to act and take measures. Broad cooperation between a number of different actors is essential, actors such as social services, health and medical care providers, women’s shelters, police and criminal justice system. It is of great importance that all actors who come into contact with this target group are properly trained and possess the correct competence to provide the help the women are entitled to, in the best possible manner.

By working actively with increased gender equality, a society can be created where girls and boys enjoy the same situation and rights, a society where girls and women are not the victims of men’s violence.
Cooperation – society’s responsibility

The most important point is to be proactive instead of reacting when the violence has already occurred. This requires innovative thinking and a willingness to take a holistic approach to, for example, an entire municipality. If a municipality is small then it can cooperate with neighbouring municipalities.

Activities aimed at preventing violence to women concern:

– Understanding that violence is a social problem and that this understanding is based on knowledge and research into men’s violence to women within close relationships.

– Carrying out interventions of two types:
  
  • Take action against the violence, protect the victims and provide support and help.
  
  • Attack the origins of the violence. Make a social analysis of the violence; understand the scope and limitations of the law, create opinion against violence and work to move the issue up the political priority list.

These two dimensions cover different groups and societal agents: the victims (both current victims and those at risk), perpetrators, the public, society’s institutions, NGOs, legislators and operative units such as the police and the courts.

Knowledge and understanding as a basis for change

In order to prevent men’s violence to women within close relationships, knowledge must be disseminated and active measures must be taken to affect values and attitudes. Knowledge must cover aspects such as the frequency of the crime and its different forms, society’s responsibility and an understanding of the gender power structure.

Sociologist Jeff Hearn who has worked with issues concerning men’s violence for two decades emphasises knowledge and training as a decisive element in preventative work. Hearn maintains that men’s excuses previously formed the norm for society’s understanding of the problem, for example that they were provoked by the woman and lost control or that they were so drunk they did not know what they were doing. He also points out the enormous need to teach about violence in schools, not least in order to prevent boys’ harassment and violence towards their female schoolmates.

Training of professionals

If men’s violence to women is to be efficiently combated it is essential that the professionals abused women meet possess the necessary knowledge about this violence and the mechanisms behind. It is vital that they have the necessary competence to recognise the problem and to treat the victims in a correct manner. Training also contributes to preventing new violent incidents.

Evaluations of educational inputs within basic training courses and continued education within, for example, the Swedish health and medical sector has shown that these activities increase the tendency to ask about violence and decrease the chances of blaming the victim. Awareness of the existence of violence in all socioeconomic groups also increases the chances of identifying more women subjected to violence who apply for help but do not state violence as the cause of their problem.
FACT BOX 7

MEETING WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO VIOLENCE

• Dare to ask. Use “neutral” expressions; avoid using the word “violence” or “assault”. Instead ask what violent events she has experienced.

• Demeanour. Meet the woman with respect and empathy. The woman is probably upset and afraid to be misunderstood or not believed.

• Say where she can get help. If she is doubtful as far as direct support is concerned, give her relevant telephone numbers and addresses in case she changes her mind. Offer her new appointments.

• Emergency inputs. Try to contact a woman who has been subjected to violence immediately. Make her understand that she cannot bear sole responsibility for the situation, that the violence often gets worse.

• Listen actively and believe the woman, do not criticise. Do not question her story. Maintain that no-one is entitled to subject her to violence. Her story is confidential. Do not add to her burden by criticising and promoting feelings of shame and guilt.

• “Fix it”. The woman may need someone who can take action and organize practical matters for her.

• Safety Plan. Help her to plan for her own and her children’s safety. Give her information on help, telephone numbers etc.

• Important preparations. Suggest that the woman gathers together important documents and essentials (e.g. clothes, credit cards, keys) in an accessible place if she has to leave the home suddenly.

• Offer follow up dialogues.

Programmes for violent men

The most important issue as concerns the treatment of violent men is to ensure that they take responsibility for their actions. They have to understand that the entire responsibility for the violent actions lies with the person who carries them out. These men must give up their excuses and explanations for their violence, stop understating its importance and stop blaming the woman, for example, by stating that she provoked him to violence. Men must realise the consequences of their violence and stop frightening and damaging their families.

There are different types of interventions, one example is motivational counselling, another is a programme of cognitive-oriented group activities with both pedagogic and therapeutic elements. Both the man’s understanding of violence and his behaviour patterns have to be changed. Consequently inputs aimed only at certain techniques for avoiding violence, for example anger management, do not achieve successful results. If the man learns to hold back his violence, without analysing its background more closely, he may shift to psychological forms of oppression instead of physical violence.\(^\text{72}\)

Results from large-scale intervention programmes have shown that women should be kept informed of the fact that the men are taking part in a programme. This is primarily for security reasons as the man may initially become even more aggressive.\(^\text{73}\)

Risk assessment instrument – SARA

One tool that is used within the Swedish prisons system and by the police is a risk assessment instrument called SARA (Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide).\(^\text{74}\) This is a checklist, developed in Canada, aimed at assessing the risk of the man relapsing into violent behaviour. Studies show that the at-risk women’s perception of the level of this risk can be as accurate as standardised measuring
instruments. The women know the men in a way that the representatives of the police or the prison system do not, and they could be consulted.

Some good examples

When municipalities really invest in municipal crisis centres/women’s shelters and provide broadly-based inputs for everyone involved, this does have an impact. Working methods, campaigns and other activities developed in one place are often spread to other places.

The action plans have also proved to be a good tool to use in the work against men’s violence to women and children. The actual work of developing the action plan can be as important as putting the plan into action. During this development process, the availability of different opportunities for inter-agency cooperation can be recognised. It is important that these action plans show that violence to women is not an issue for social services only, but involves all municipal operations. When the plan has been completed, it must be followed up and not be left to collect dust on a shelf. Inputs of all kinds must be followed up and evaluated as the evaluation phase is when needs for change and development are recognised.

National Centre for knowledge on men’s violence to women in Uppsala, Sweden

In 1994, Uppsala County Council established the National Women’s Centre in order to offer health and medical care to women subjected to violence, plus to develop methods for their reception and care and to undertake training and research.

Initially the centre was a unit within the Women’s Clinic at Uppsala University Hospital, however in 2001 it became an independent unit. The centre has, together with primary health care, established guidelines for health care professionals when dealing with women who have been physically or sexually abused. They have also, together with Uppsala University Hospital, developed an action plan for the care of women subjected to violence that may be used as a model for other action plans within the health care system. Currently this centre is under reconstruction and has become a national centre of excellence for these issues.

Gothenburg, Sweden

Since 2004, Gothenburg Municipality has produced a manual to facilitate the work of its agencies, which has replaced its previous action plan. This manual describes the problem including how different groups, such as substance abusing women, are affected. In addition it describes what happens to children in physically abusive relationships as well as providing a description of the entire legal process. Extensive references for further information searching are also provided.

Trollhättan, Sweden

Trollhättan recently opened a municipal women’s centre which, due to successful cooperation with the various other municipal units concerned, has developed its activities. There is one crisis centre for women, one for children and one for men. They provide safe housing for women and children with the opportunity to take part in crisis counselling. A legal firm is available for support and legal advice. There is also a section providing advice and support through which they hope to identify women in destructive relationships at an early stage. This section also runs outreach activities such as disseminating knowledge and acting as adviser to local government authorities. Here, and in a number of other places, special measures are in place concerning women not born in Sweden who may experience special problems in approaching the relevant authorities for help. Measures include providing information in several languages and employing people with knowledge concerning honour-related violence.
Hässelby-Vällingby, Sweden

One example of a knowledge-based action plan is that of Hässelby-Vällingby District Council in Stockholm from 2005. In the introduction to the action plan it is stated “Men’s violence to women must be interpreted in a social and cultural context in which men are deemed superior to women. The violence is both an expression of a gender power structure and a method of maintaining this structure.”

Even if the focus of the action plan lies with the work of social services, cooperation with other authorities and external groups is included. The plan also explicitly includes women with disabilities, women who are substance abusers and same gender partner violence. It also mentions girls and women who are threatened by honour-related violence, prostitutes and genital mutilation of girls/women.

Duluth, USA

All available research shows that violence to women and children is best managed when the relevant authorities and other organisations involved work together and where their operations enjoy the full support of upper management of both operative and political organisations. The example provided by Duluth shows this in an extremely convincing manner.

The town of Duluth in Minnesota USA has, by working on a broad front, become a leader in the work against violence to women and children. Every step of their process has been carefully evaluated and what began as a small-scale project in a town of 100 000 inhabitants has now been studied and emulated all over the world.

Operations use the women’s shelters as their hub. The town’s agencies - from police to medical care and social services – cooperate and have also developed their own policies and practices. The business community has contributed as sponsors and advocates. In order to publicise the ongoing campaign, stickers for stores and others to put up were produced which state that this location participates in the campaign against violence to women. This campaign dealt with both the basic preconditions for decreasing violence as well as good methods for support and care of the three parties involved: the woman, the children and the man. They work both preventively and with interventions when violence has already occurred.

As concerns their experience of cooperation, the importance of a strong individual to hold everything together and move operations forward is emphasised. The goal is that the violence must decrease and preferably be totally eradicated, and it is pointed out that this is a common interest that benefits all residents – not least as far as taxes are concerned – if such costs can be reduced.

“Frideborg” in Norrköping, Sweden

One example of broad, regional cooperation in Sweden is the “Frideborg” unit in Östergötland which has been operational for a little more than ten years. This system involves the social services in several towns plus the probation services, county council, police, the public prosecutor and the women’s shelter. There are group activities for women who have been subjected to violence, for children and for men who use violence. Contact and support (anonymously if requested), and safe housing are also offered.

The Östergötland Regional Action Plan should also be mentioned here, among other reasons because this policy document has not neglected to include the gender equality aspect. Its first point states “Men’s violence to women is not in line with efforts to achieve a gender equal society.”
Campaigns against men’s violence to women

Some prominent campaigns aimed at the general public have demonstrated that openly discussing men’s violence to women and children may still be a sensitive issue. When the perpetrator is in focus and men’s violence is linked to women’s subordinate status as compared to men, strong feelings are sometimes generated. However, it is just at this point, when women and men become aware of how they themselves recreate behaviour patterns that enable violence, that change is possible. Information campaigns can contribute to illuminating the underlying causes of violence as well as possible solutions to this problem.

Focus on the perpetrators

The National Organization for Women’s Shelters and Young Women’s Shelters in Sweden (ROKS) carried out a national campaign in 1998 which received a considerable amount of attention. It was sponsored by the business community among others. This campaign broke with previous tradition and placed the perpetrator, not the victim, in the spotlight. The central message was that violence is a crime and it may be your neighbour, colleague or sister who is the victim and the perpetrator may be someone you know.

This campaign consisted of outdoor ads, information brochures and TV ads. In the pictures there were outwardly well adjusted people who could have been models - not the alienated, the stigmatised. Its central message was that appearances cannot say who is a perpetrator and who is his victim.

“Operation Women’s Freedom from Molestation”

Information has been the primary aim of Stockholm County’s “Operation Women’s Freedom from Molestation”. In this project, municipalities, the county council, government authorities, NGOs and the business community have cooperated in campaigns and debates. “Operation Women’s Freedom from Molestation” has also published easy-to-read, useful fact sheets which have been distributed in many different arenas.

One campaign from this operation in 2000 attracted considerable attention with its message that men’s violence to women also threatens children. Outdoor posters showed pictures of despairing children together with texts such as “I never want to be like my dad”. This led to serious protests. Apparently the critics were more worried about the fact that men might be perceived in a not totally positive fashion than they were about the serious assaults that many children and women have suffered.

White ribbon

Several campaigns have been run by men. One example is the White Ribbon Campaign which is in place in almost every country in the world. It was initiated in Canada in 1991 is based on men demonstrating their personal position on this issue by wearing a white ribbon. The campaign began as a reaction to the event known as the Montreal Massacre of 1989 when 14 female students at the University of Montreal were killed by a man who felt he had been passed over and that feminists had destroyed his life. The campaign became a way for many men to mark their revulsion at men’s violence to women.

Male networks

In Sweden the Piteå Appeal, which occurred in 2005 in protest against attitudes to violence to women, achieved considerable impact. It was triggered by the amount of coverage the local newspaper allocated to a man who had been injured by a bear in comparison with a woman whose husband had killed her with an axe. The mauled man received masses of sympathy and lots of space in the paper while the woman, who had previously suffered a
considerable amount of violence from her husband, received only a brief notice. The strong reaction of the men of Piteå formed the basis of a local network of men who take an active position against men’s violence to women. This initiative has been followed by other towns. These male networks often work to support women’s and/or young women’s shelters in their home towns as well as disseminating knowledge through lectures for example.

**Towards a society free from violence**

The majority of women who are subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence from a man close to them never report the perpetrator. This violence occurs almost always in the place where it should be the safest – the woman’s own home. When the woman finally contacts the police, she has usually suffered several years’ abuse before doing so. However changes to working methods within the police, public prosecutors, health and medical care have worked towards increasing the tendency to report.

Society must shoulder its responsibility and intensify its operations to combat men’s violence to women as well as supplying the support and protection that so many girls and women need. Many women subjected to violence testify that they do not receive the help and support they are entitled to and often experience the legal process as a new violation. One decisive issue is that all professional groups who meet these women and their children must be properly trained.

The forms of male domination in society that are expressed as rape, physical abuse and murder must be met by active, clearly expressed condemnation by the entire society. Men’s violence to women is a crime against human rights and concerns us all. As regards gender violence, zero tolerance is the only alternative. A good democracy is worth nothing less.
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Men’s violence to women in close relationships – gender violence – is a major social problem. It is a public health problem that brings with it serious, costly consequences for both the individual and society.

This booklet provides a brief overview of the problem. The various forms of violence are discussed, as are explanations as to how violence is able to occur to the extent it does. Good examples of working with women subjected to violence and their children are described, as well as indications of how to work in a preventative manner.

With this booklet, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) wishes to stimulate and reinforce gender violence prevention activities at local, regional and national levels.